age for Bengal announced", appearing in Business Standard, Calcutta, on 11th February, 1999, regarding Eastern Coalfields Ltd., (ECL);

(b) whether the decision not to retrench any one in ECL, as reported above, has been conveyed to ECL Board;

(c) if not, the reasons therefor;

(d) whether retrenchment with higher compensation through VRS is also not being forced on unions, as per the above decision; and

(e) *if so, the reasons therefor?*

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRI DILIP RAY): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (e) The matter is under active consideration.

Exploitation of CBM

782. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there has been an acute stagnation in growth in Coal Sector for the last several years;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps proposed to activate growth in this sector, including the steps for exploiting the Coal Bed Methane (CBM), which is considered to be the fuel of the next century?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRI DILIP RAY): (a) No, Sir. Production of coal in India has increased from a level of about 70 million tonnes in the early 1970s to 297.18 million tonnes in 1997-98 (Provisional).

(b) Does not arise.

(c) India have a potential of exploitation of coal Bed Methane in its coal deposits and have delineated eight areas for its exploration and exploitation. Two more areas under process of finalisation. In addition to above, a demonstration project for Coal Bed Methane recovery and Commercial utilisation is being taken up with Global Environment Facility/United Nations Development Programme assistance with the objectives of degasifying coal seams for safer extraction of coal as well as the demonstrate economic viability of harnessing Coal Bed Methane in India.

Crisis in Singarauli Collieries

783. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whehter Government's attention has been drawn to the newsitem captioned "Singrauli" Collieries facing crises, may close mines, appearing in the 'Hindu' dated the 21st January, 1999;

(b) if so, the facts reported therein;

(c) the reaction of Government in this regard; and

(d) the steps taken by Government in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRI DILIP RAY): (a) to (d) The news item published in "Hindu" dated 21st January, 1999 was about Singareni Collieries and not about Singrarauli Collieries. The Singareni Collieries are operated by Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) in Andhra Pradesh. SCCL is a joint undertaking of Government of Andhra Pradesh and Government of India sharing the equity capital of the company in 51:49 ratio. The administrative control over SCCL is however with the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

The Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL), having its headquarters in Singrauli, located in Sidhi District of Madhya Pradesh, is a subsidiary company of Coal India Limited. The coal mines operated by NCL are located in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.